

## A Function of Proper Names in “Easter 1916”

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Questions of the relation between Yeats and politics, such as “Yeats and nationalism” or “Yeats as nationalist”, have been often discussed among critics. Conor Cruise O’Brien’s essay, “Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats” triggered off the discussion: some critics follow O’Brien, characterizing Yeats’s “true” nationality as Anglo-Irish Protestant and indicting his political opinions as elitist and authoritarian; others seek to exonerate him by attributing to him the label of an Irish nationalist, or by describing him as a liberal humanist and individualist<sup>(1)</sup>. Still others map his transition from Irish nationalist to Anglo-Irish reactionary<sup>(2)</sup>. The reason such discussions are inextricable seems to me that, though Yeats’s authoritarian political inclination are as insistent as they are consistent with his aesthetics, such arguments is of little avail when it comes to the attempt to comprehend the obsessive, haunting quality of his work. This is to suggest neither that we should abandon political judgement to aesthetic adoration nor that there should be anything to be gained by simple ethical condemnation. It is obvious that Yeats’s aesthetics cannot be separated from his politics. He says in “J. M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time”: “all noble things are the result of warfare; great nations and classes, of warfare in the visible world, great poetry and philosophy, of invisible warfare, the division of a mind within itself, a victory, the sacrifice of a man to himself”<sup>(3)</sup>. Here politics represented by “nations and classes” are described by the same metaphor-warfare-as that referring to “poetry and philosophy. Besides, an ideology represented by the discourse of such poetic symbolism as we see in Yeats’s early works is similar to one represented by the discourse of political nationalism in that both appeal to the power of symbols which makes synecdochical continuity possible. Whether it is

political or poetic, the symbol “is the product of the organic growth of form” and “is always a part of the totality that it represents”<sup>(4)</sup>. Therefore, what makes inextricable the problem of Yeats’s politics and aesthetics, it seems to me, is not the rift between politics and poetics, but the fact that critics base their arguments on what Yeats’s “politics” deliberately avoids in his later works, that is, on recalcitrant identity formation such as Irish, Anglo-Irish, or humanist; his later works refuse the formation of (national) identity which is usually developed with the notion of (national) origin as symbol. After examining Yeats’s position in the so-called Celtic Revival, I shall argue that the political questions raised by Yeats’s “Easter 1916” are inseparable from aesthetic questions, just as, in his earlier writings, symbolist aesthetics is inseparable from the politics of cultural nationalism. Yet where the earlier writings are devoted to the founding of a national identity, the later writings, especially after “Easter 1916” and in the wake of the Irish Free State’s foundation, subject all acts of identity formation to the rigorous examination within a set of aesthetic terms which are profoundly antithetical to any tradition of symbolism based on synecdochical continuity.

As Seamus Deane observes, ‘between the end of the Famine in 1848 and Sinn Fein’s great electoral triumph in 1918, Ireland began the long process of its transformation from a British colony into a modern, independent state’.<sup>(5)</sup> It is natural that, to be an independent state, colonial Ireland needed some national identity different from what was imposed by the British; a “second nature” imagined by literary men like Spenser or Arnold, whether it is turbulence, wildness and barbarousness, or romantic spontaneity and valor, had to be countered by a “third nature”. According to Edward Said:

With the new territoriality there comes a whole set of further assertions, recoveries, and identifications; all of them quite literally grounded on this poetically projected base. The search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history, for a new pantheon of heroes, myths, and religions. . .<sup>(6)</sup>

Thus myth as an ideological weapon was deployed by the Revivalists. On the other hand, in the context of Irish writing, such cultural nationalism could not deviate from the tradition of literary unionism which is represented especially by Maria Edgeworth and Sir Samuel Ferguson: the ancient figures of Fionn, Cuchulain and Cathleen Ni Houlihan were invoked whose "prehistoric integrity might compensate for the ruptures of Irish history and resolve its endless quarrels between colonizer and colonized, Planter and Gael, Protestant and Catholic".<sup>(7)</sup> However, such cultural nationalism or formation of national identity has caused other trouble. Despite the invaluable work of cultural retrieval undertaken by successive nationalist movements, one principal and consistent dynamic of identity formation has been the negation of recalcitrant or inassimilable elements of Irish society. Though the conflict in Northern Ireland is clearly based on the political problem caused by British colonialism, the problem of identity, that is, whether one is Protestant or Catholic, has been substituted for the problem of politics. Further, the search for identity means one for origin. Concerning the problem of origin in the context of the conflict of Northern Ireland, Seamus Deane says as follows:

The Irish Revival and its predecessors had the right idea in looking to some legendary past for the legitimating origin of Irish society as one distinct from the British, which had a different conception of origin. But the search for origin, like that for identity, is self contradictory. Once the origin is understood to be an invention, however necessary, it can never again be thought as something "natural". A culture brings itself into being by an

act of cultural invention that itself depends on an anterior legitimating nature. . . . Nature may be a cultural invention, but it is nonetheless powerful for that. . . . In Northern Ireland that invention is not lost; it is in dispute. The terms of the dispute can be crude. The "native" Irish can say they came first; the Protestant planters can say that they were the first to create a civil society. . .<sup>(8)</sup>

In addition to the problem of whether one is Protestant or Catholic ("native" Irish), there also lies in the conflict the implicit violence of identity formation, not so much in the sense that identity seems to provoke and legitimate a sectarian antagonism towards the different, as in the far more fundamental sense in which the formation of identity requires the negation of other possible forms of existing. It would be easy to attack Yeats as an inventor of national myth which is an agency of integrity, continuity and unbroken heritage, and to take sides with Joyce who treated myth as an agency of critique and rewrote "it as a subversion of origins and identities, a catalyst of disruption and difference, a joker in the pack inviting us to a free variation of meaning".<sup>(9)</sup> Richard Kearney's mapping is a typical example of such reading. He says after Karl Mannheim as follows:

In *Finnegans Wake* we find the axial characters of Celtic mythology - for example, Fionn and Anna - redrafted as actors of liberty and fun, iconoclasts of the very notion of a sacrosanct identity transmitted unscathed and uncompromised from the ancient past. They become 'bringers of plurality'. This approach to myth I call *utopian*. In contrast to the [Yeats's] *ideological* use of myth, which seeks to reinstate a people, nation or race in its predestined 'place', the utopian myth opens up a 'no-place' (*u-topos*). It emancipates the imagination into a historical future rather than harnessing it into a hallowed past.<sup>(10)</sup>

Yet when Kearney appeals to "pluralism" which is the very ideological model of how contradiction between specific and universal may be resolved, isn't he tracing

the rut made by the Revivalists who were modernists at the same time? That is why Seamus Deane opposes mystifying pluralism which is ‘the concealed imperialism of the multinational’.<sup>(11)</sup> If Yeats is singled out as an inventor of an Irish national myth or a “heroic style”, then Joyce could be referred to as an inventor of another Irish grand narrative, another “heroic style”, as Deane observes:

Joyce, although he attempted to free himself from set political positions, did finally create, in *Finnegans Wake*, a characteristically modern way of dealing with heterogeneous and intractable material and experience. The pluralism of his styles and languages, the absorbent nature of controlling myths and systems, finally gives a certain harmony to varied experience. But, it could be argued, it is the harmony of indifference, one in which everything is a version of something else, where sameness rules over diversity, where contradiction is finally and disquietingly written out. In achieving this in literature, Joyce anticipated the capacity of modern society to integrate almost all antagonistic elements by transforming them into fashions, fads-styles, in short.<sup>(12)</sup>

It seems that, while Joyce’s strategy neglected the dynamics of Irish history which is described in Said’s analysis cited above, as he set about his work after the first stage of anti-colonialism which was regressive but necessary, Yeats committed himself to it. No doubt he served to establish some kind of Irishness as a crucial first step during the era of the Celtic Revival. But the problem is the way he dealt with such Irishness — identity formation — in the wake of the Irish Free State’s foundation.

In “The Circus Animals’ Desertion”, Yeats picks up from his past works only his earlier ones: *The Wanderings of Oisín* in 1889, *The Countess Cathleen* in 1892, and *On Baile’s Strand* in 1904. This selection is suggestive in that Yeats’s work shows a major rift between the earlier and later works. Is there any relation between this rift and the problem of nationalism or

formation of national identity? Before the close examination of “Easter 1916”, I shall see a typical discourse formation in nationalism. Benedict Anderson’s consideration of nationalism starts with a definition of the nation: the nation is “an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”<sup>(13)</sup>. Referring to cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers as the most arresting emblem of the modern culture of nationalism, Anderson points out that there is a strong affinity between ‘nationalist imagining’ and “religious imagining” in that both of them concern themselves with the problem of “the contingency of life” whose extreme form is death: concerned with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of re-generation, they “respond to obscure intimations of immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity”, combining “connectedness, fortuity, and fatality in a language of ‘continuity’”. With the proviso that he does not suggest that nationalism supersedes religion, Anderson observes as follows:

The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into community, contingency into meaning. . . few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. . . It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. With Debray we might say, “Yes, it is quite accidental that I am born French; but after all, France is eternal”.<sup>(14)</sup>

In short, the narrative of nationalism is one which has its basis on continuity, just as the narrative of symbolism appeals to synecdochical continuity. If we follow Anderson’s argument, we can regard cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers as symbols of modern nationalism which organize the incoherent desires of the

population towards the goal of popular unity — “The long grey line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and grey, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, Honour, Country”<sup>15</sup>. The narrative of nationalism — national symbolism — enables martyrs’ self-sacrifice in the name of a country to assert their utter identity with the nation, progressively leading its subjects on by way of symbols which are consubstantial with the nation which they represent. Martyrs who, as symbol, organize the coherent unity or continuity of the nation often appear in Yeats’s poems. To see whether they serve as a symbol of national identity for Yeats, I will examine “Easter 1916”, which is often regarded, in spite of the poet’s intention, as a nationalist poem because, as Declan Kiberd says, the rebels of the Easter Uprising “are converted into classroom clichés and his own poem [is] quoted only for a refrain which will be [sic] ripped out of its wider context”<sup>16</sup>.

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“Easter 1916” starts with a mode of casual comedy where the poet utters only “polite meaningless words” and thinks of “a mocking tale or gibe” to please companions, and where “motley is worn” which is “the sign of a hopeless national buffoonery”<sup>17</sup>. What change takes place in the penultimate line of the first stanza, “All changed, changed utterly”, becomes clear towards the end of the second stanza: “He, too, has resigned his part / In the casual comedy”. Here one will think of the change as one from casual comedy to national tragedy. According to Yeats, mainly tragic art “diminishes the power of [the] daily mood”: “The persons upon the stage, let us say, greaten till they are all humanity”<sup>18</sup>. The change is stated more clearly in the third stanza:

Hearts with *one purpose alone*  
Through summer and winter seem  
Enchanted to *a stone*  
To trouble the living stream. (Italics mine)

As Kiberd says, “the fragmented comic worlds of

individuals at cross purposes is replaced by a lyric solidarity of tragic oneness”<sup>19</sup>. The “motley” of buffoonery is integrated and transformed into *one* color — of course, into green. Daily affairs of life which are exposed to flux and change — “Minute by minute they change”— come to be organized by one purpose: “Minute by minute they live: The stone’s in the midst of all”. In spite of the repetition of a word, “change”, “a stone” becomes a national symbol which unifies — quilts — various significations of life into one ideology. The beginning of the fourth stanza makes clear what is implied by “a stone”: “Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart”. “A stone” implies not only a cenotaph of the martyrs but also a founding stone of a unified nation which necessarily requires a national identity based on a “long sacrifice” under colonialism. All change and variety of life — “living stream” — are integrated by the stone. Thus read, the enumeration of the martyrs in the last stanza might seem a mere textual duty to name and praise the warrior dead. But one thing is missed in this reading; the usage of proper names.

The poet’s key strategy throughout the poem is that he defer the naming of the martyrs until the last stanza, and that any descriptive features are not attributed to those proper names which appear in the end. Kiberd writes as follows:

The power of his poem [“Easter 1916”] derives from the honesty with which he debates the issue, in the process postponing until the very last moment his dutiful naming of the dead warriors: this had been, of course, the practice of bards after a battle, in which they invariably claimed that the land had been redeemed by the sacrifice. Yeats’s entire lyric is a sequence of strategies for delaying such naming: and the expectations deliberately aroused by the title, which suggests unqualified encomium, are sharply contested, and disappointed, and honoured in the text.<sup>20</sup>

In the first stanza, the martyrs suggested by the title, “Easter 1916”, are collectively designated by a pronoun “them”. When the poet describes each martyr in the second stanza, he uses demonstrative pronouns; “this

man”, “this other”, and “this other man”. The same is true towards the end of the last stanza; the martyrs are still designated by pronouns, not proper names; “their” and “they”. Here again Benedict Anderson’s argument on nationalism is suggestive: “No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers”<sup>(21)</sup>. A “stone” which implies the martyrs’ cenotaph appears in the sequence where they are designated only by pronouns; they are nameless and “Unknown soldiers”. In other words, they can be a symbol of a nation-yet-to-come in so far as they are nameless and unknown.

In spite of his suggestive observation cited above, Kiberd does not brood on the function of the proper names compared with the pronouns. He points out as a reason for the poet’s prolonged hesitation to name “them” as follows: “if to name is to assert power over the rebels, then to refuse the option is to admit their power over him, an influence discernible in his complimentary use of quotations and metaphors from their writings”<sup>(22)</sup>. A similar conclusion is reached by another critic, who tries to show the poet’s linguistic power of naming over a historical event: “Dramatizing his act of writing the names into a verse, the poet again suggests that it is he who has changed them utterly. By the synecdoche of a name, he inscribes each rebel into this lyric, ‘Now and in time to be’. He reenacts a historical change as a perpetual linguistic event”<sup>(23)</sup>. Neither of the critics refer to the inconsistency found between the second stanza and the last stanza. It is true that, in the last stanza, the poet names the martyrs and seems to honor them into national myth:

I write it out in a verse -  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

It is also true that, in the second stanza, the martyrs’ features are described: “This man” who “had kept a school / And rode our winged horse” is Patrick Pearse;

“This other” who were his helper and friend”, and whose nature seemed sensitive, is Thomas MacDonagh; and “this other man” who the poet had thought were “a drunken, vainglorious lout” is John MacBride. However, the second stanza starts with a description of a woman who is not a martyr of the uprising and who, of course, is not named in the last stanza:

That woman’s days were spent  
In ignorant good-will,  
Her nights in argument  
Until her voice grew shrill.

“That woman” is Countess Constance Markievicz, who “founded the Fianna, a nationalist boys’ organization, joined the Citizen Army, was a staff officer in the Rising and was sentenced to death”<sup>(24)</sup>. Yet her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and then she was released in an amnesty in 1917: she is not a martyr. That is why there is a rift between the second stanza and the last, that is, between the function of the pronouns and that of the proper names in the poem. The figures who appear with demonstrative pronouns in the second stanza — “that woman”, “this man”, “this other” — represent collectively nationalism as nameless and unknown. Yet the list of nationalists described with demonstrative pronouns does not correctly correspond to the list of proper names in the last stanza. Therefore, “this man” in the second stanza does not exactly signify Patrick Pearse, nor “his other” Thomas MacDonagh, nor “this other man” John MacBride. There is something in each proper name which, as surplus, is more than what is nationalistic.

This will be clearer if one compares the poem with another elegy, “September 1913”, which honors a nationalist, John O’Leary, who was influenced by the Young Ireland movement and became identified with the Fenian movement which succeeded it. In “September 1913”, too, the nationalists are described by a pronoun, “they”:

They have gone about the world like wind,  
But little time had they to pray  
For whom the hangman’s rope was spun,

And what, God help us, could they save?  
 Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
 It's with O'Leary in the grave.

One will notice the shift of the pronoun "it" in this stanza to "they" in the last: "They're with O'Leary in the grave". If "it" in the last line of the quoted stanza indicates "Romantic Ireland", "they" in the last stanza also indicates "Romantic Ireland"; they collectively represent nationalists. Though a proper name, O'Leary, appears in this poem, it is comprehended in the group of nationalists — "They're *with* O'Leary in the grave [*Italics mine*]". Thus the grave of O'Leary can be regarded as just one of many other graves of nameless and unknown nationalists. The apposition here of the pronoun "they" and the proper name "O'Leary" cannot be applied to "Easter 1916"; as I mentioned above, in "Easter 1916", the pronouns in the second stanza do not correctly correspond to the martyrs named in the last stanza. The usage of proper names in this poem is also different from that in another elegy, "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" where the proper names, "Augusta Gregory" and "John Synge", are followed by *descriptive* features. In "Easter 1916", no feature is attributed to each of the proper names; they are just enumerated. Then, what is the function of those proper names in "Easter 1916" which appear suddenly in the last stanza without any attributes or descriptive features?

To examine the function of proper names, I shall introduce a frame of reference: *Naming and Necessity* by Saul Kripke who argues for antidescriptivism, and Slavoj Žižek's observation on the dispute between descriptivism and antidescriptivism. The dispute between descriptivism and Kripke's antidescriptivism is the way names refer to the objects which they denote. Why does the word "table" refer to a table? The descriptivist answer is the obvious one: because of its meaning; every word is in the first place the bearer of a certain meaning — that is, it means a cluster of descriptive features ("table" means an object of a certain shape, serving certain purpose) and subsequently refers to objects in reality in so far as they possess properties designated by the cluster of descriptions.

"Table" means a table because a table has properties comprised in the meaning of the word "table". On the other hand, Kripke's antidescriptivism implies two different types of names: notions denoting (universal) kinds and proper names. According to Kripke, proper names cannot be resolved into a cluster of descriptive features because of "primal baptism". The point of his argument is that a proper name has been linked to a certain person through a "primal baptism", and this link holds even if the original identifying description proves false. Žižek simplifies Kripke's argument as follows:

If we refer to somebody as "fat", it is clear that he must at least possess the property [descriptive feature] of being excessively corpulent, but if we refer to somebody as "Peter", we cannot infer any of his effective properties [descriptive features] — the name "Peter" refers to him simply because he was baptized "Peter".<sup>(25)</sup>

According to Žižek, the core of the dispute between descriptivists and antidescriptivists is that "descriptivists emphasize the immanent, internal 'intentional contents' of a word, while antidescriptivists regard as decisive the external causal link, the way a word has been transmitted from subject to subject in a chain of tradition"<sup>(26)</sup>.

To sum up Kripke's argument: if we ask the general public for identifying descriptions of "William Butler Yeats", the answer would be "a poet", "a playwright", "the author of *A Vision*", "a senator of Irish Free state", and so on; but suppose that *A Vision* was written by another person, for example Georgie Hyde-Lees, the wife of Yeats, and that Yeats persuaded her to publish the book in his name; in this case, the name "William Butler Yeats" would still refer to the same Yeats, although the identifying description, "the author of *A Vision*", would no longer apply to him. The point is that the name "Yeats" has been linked to a certain object (person) through a "primal baptism" even if the original identifying description proves false<sup>(27)</sup>. The statement that "Yeats was not the author of *A Vision*" makes sense. On the other hand, suppose we follow the descriptivist argument and replace the proper

name, "Yeats", with a descriptive feature, "the author of *A Vision*"; when, in the future (a possible world), a fact is revealed that Yeats did not write *A Vision* himself, we will have to say "the author of *A Vision*' was not in fact the author of *A Vision*". This statement is simply self-contradictory and does not make any sense. Thus we cannot regard the proper name "William Butler Yeats" as equal to the descriptive feature, "the author of *A Vision*". Proper names cannot be resolved into a cluster of descriptive features. In other words, proper names always assume some surplus in addition to descriptive features.

As I mentioned above, in each proper name in the last stanza of "Easter 1916" there is something which, as surplus, is more than what is nationalistic. To see what Yeats implies by the surplus inscribed in proper names, we have to recognize the difference of the tenses just before the often quoted refrain — "A terrible beauty is born". In the first stanza, the tense is past; "All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born". In the second, it is present perfect: He, too, has been changed in his turn, / Transformed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born". The change found from the first through the second to the third stanza is, as I mentioned, one from casual comedy to national tragedy which will be a founding stone of national identity. As the tenses show, the change belongs to the past or the present when the poet is writing the poem. On the other hand, the tense in the last stanza is not past nor present perfect: it is present — "Are changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born". This present tense signifies not only present but also future, as we easily notice in the line "Now and in time to be". We might as well mistake the line "Wherever green is worn" for "Whenever green is worn". Signification of the proper names, "MacDonagh, MacBride, Connolly and Pearse", changes, whenever green is worn: the change is repetitive, as is shown by a present tense open to repetitive moments in the future.

Proper names are open to all possible worlds, compared with other common names. Kripke's examples of the words "gold" and "unicorn" clarifies the difference:

there might be a substance which has all the identifying marks we commonly attributed to gold and used to identify it in the first place, but which is not the same kind of thing, which is not the same substance. We would say of such a thing that though it has all the appearances we initially used to identify gold, it is not gold.<sup>(28)</sup>

Because the substance which "has all the identifying marks we commonly attribute to gold" is not linked to the name "gold" through a causal chain which reaches back to the "primal baptism" establishing the reference of "gold", we cannot say "it is *that* gold (that we know)": we call it "the substance which has the same marks as gold". Further Kripke talks about the common noun, unicorn", as follows:

even if archaeologists or geologists were to discover tomorrow some fossils conclusively showing the existence of animals in the past satisfying everything we know about unicorns from the myth of the unicorn, that would not show that there were unicorns<sup>(29)</sup>.

With proper names, we can suppose a possible world where "Yeats was not the author of *A Vision*": we can say "Yeats was not the author of *A Vision*" when we cannot deny the possibility that someday the fact may be revealed that "Yeats was not the author of *A Vision*". On the other hand, such a supposition cannot be applied to the common name "unicorn". This is not the problem of factuality but that of linguistic usage. Kripke says that, even if an animal which has the same marks as a unicorn is discovered tomorrow, we call it "an animal which has the same marks as a unicorn": we do not say "that unicorn (that we know in myth) was discovered". In a possible world where a pseudo-unicorn is discovered, it will be called by another name: the common noun "unicorn" will not be attributed to the pseudo-unicorn. Instead, some new name will be coined for the animal even though it has the same mark as "unicorn". On the contrary, in a possible world where the fact is revealed that Yeats did not write *A Vision* himself, such proper names as "Yeats" will remain

“Yeats”: unlike the case of “unicorn”, any new name will not be coined for “Yeats who is not the author of *A Vision*”. To say it in the other way around, the descriptive features attributed to the proper name “Yeats” are to be revised in all possible worlds. To the last, Kripke’s all possible worlds, all counterfactual situations, correspond to the possibility of a statement in reality. When we hear a proper name, for example “Yeats”, we always receive what cannot be resolved into any fixed descriptive features — the surplus implied by the proper name: we receive at the same time the possibility that the descriptive features accompanying the proper name can be revised. It is this *revisability* that Kripke refers to as the surplus accompanying a proper name. According to him, this revisability in all possible worlds is not necessary when one thinks of such common noun as “unicorn”. On the other hand, it is this *revisability* in all possible worlds, all counterfactual situations, that is significant to proper names.

The former part of the last stanza of “Easter 1916”, just before the enumeration of the martyrs, is marked by four question marks, as opposed to the first three stanzas which consists of declarative sentences except one interrogative sentence. As Declan Kiberd says, none of the questions are “properly answered, but each suppressed by an even more pressing interrogation”<sup>(30)</sup>. To the prayer-like question “O when may it suffice?”, the poet answers by separating “Heaven’s part” and “our part”, but “our part / To murmur name upon name” leads to another interrogation:

What is it but nightfall?  
 No, no, not night but death;  
 Was it needless death after all?  
 . . . . .  
 We know their dream; enough  
 To know they dreamed and are dead;  
 And what if excess of love  
 Bewildered them till they died?

Each question is accompanied by no decisive answer. An answer produces another question: the paradigm of the first question is shifted to another paradigm by the

answer itself which produces another question— question / answer is necessarily *revised* endlessly. Never answering the last question, the poet suddenly starts enumerating the martyrs’ proper names: all possible worlds open through the proper names whose surplus suggests *revisability*.

Nameless, unknown martyrs without proper names can be forged in to a cenotaph — a stone — to symbolize a nation. But, by enumerating the martyrs’ proper names, the poet dismantles a stone — a symbol of national identity — which was composed in the second and third stanza. Those proper names prevent the national narrative from reinstating the people or the nation in its predestined place, suggesting *revisability*: the people do not have to be bound to some rigid national ideology. National identity cannot be guaranteed in all possible worlds implied by proper names. The surplus of proper names which remain the same in all possible worlds is something in it more than itself. When Richard Kearney, in the passage quoted above, thinks of Yeats as a founder of ideological myth, he uses the term, “ideology”, without deliberation. Slavoj Zizek relates the function of names, which is argued by antidescriptivists, to “the real-impossible correlative (what is in an object more than the object)” of ideological identification. According to him, “what creates and sustain the identity of a given ideological field beyond all possible variations of its content” is a “nodal point (point de caption)” which totalizes, includes in its series of equivalences, the free floating of ideological elements: “Ideological space is made of non-bound, non-tied elements, ‘floating signifiers’, whose identity is ‘open’, overdetermined by their articulation in a chain with other elements”; but, once a nodal point is decided, it “performs the totalization by means of which this free floating of ideological elements is halted, fixed — that is say, by means of which they become parts of the structured network of meaning”. But what if the nodal point which supports identity is a proper name? It is useless to search for it in positive reality because it has no positive consistency owing to its surplus; “it is just an objectification of a void, of a discontinuity opened in reality by the signifier”:

The "rigid designator [nodal point]" aims, then at that impossible-real kernel, at what is "in an object more than the object", at this surplus produced by the signifying operation. And the crucial point to grasp is the connection between the radical contingency of naming and the logic of emergence of the "rigid designator" through which a given object achieves its identity. The radical contingency of naming implies an irreducible gap between the Real and modes of its symbolization: a certain historical constellation can be symbolized in different ways; the Real itself contains no necessary mode of its symbolization<sup>(31)</sup>

The proper names in "Easter 1916" assert the irruption of a content that is in excess of any form and inassimilable to the national myth, that is, the linear narrative time of the nation. In spite of Maud Gonne's statement that "tragic dignity has returned to Ireland"<sup>(32)</sup>, in "Easter 1916" they cannot be a tragic myth of national foundation as *the* origin of the nation, but imply beginnings which will be revised every time they are referred to: they recurrently appear as new beginnings, revised. Whenever "green is worn", the signification of MacDonagh, MacBride, Connolly, and Pearse changes utterly: every time the heroic myth of Cuchulain is asserted, the proper names recurrently intervene the symbolization.

#### Notes

- (1) For example, see Cullingford, Elizabeth, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1981)
- (2) See, for example, Stanfield, Paul Scott. *Yeats and Politics in the Nineteen-Thirties* (London: Macmillan, 1988)
- (3) Yeats, William Butler. *Essays & Introductions*. (London: Macmillan, 1989) 321
- (4) de Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

1983) 191

- (5) Deane, Seamus. *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880 - 1980*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1985) 12
- (6) Said, Edward. 'Yeats and Decolonization' in Seamus Deane (Ed.) *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 79
- (7) Kearney, Richard. 'Myth and Modernity in Irish Poetry' in Elmer Andrews (Ed.) *Contemporary Irish Poetry: A Collection of Critical Essays*. (London: Macmillan, 1992) 41
- (8) Deane, Seamus. 'Introduction' in Seamus Deane (Ed.) *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. 17. In another essay, Deane points out another harmful effect of identity formation and says as follows: 'The terms of the dispute[a battle between Romantic and contemporary Ireland] are outmoded but they linger on. The most obvious reason for this is the continuation of the Northern "problems", where "unionism" and "nationalism" still compete for supremacy in relation to ideas of identity racially defined as either "Irish" or "British" in communities which are deformed by believing themselves to be the historic inheritors of those identities and the traditions presumed to go with them'. Deane, Seamus *Heroic Styles: the tradition of an idea* A Field Day pamphlet No.4 (Derry, 1984) 13
- (9) Kearney, 'Myth and Modernity in Irish Poetry'. 42
- (10) See Kearney, 'Myth and Modernity in Irish Poetry'. 41 - 42
- (11) Deane (Ed.), *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. 19
- (12) Deane, *Heroic Styles: the tradition of an idea*. 16
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- (18) Yeats, *Essays & Introductions*. 243-245
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- (25) Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (London and New York: Verso, 1989) 90
- (26) Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. 90
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- (28) Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. 119
- (29) Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. 24
- (30) Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*. 215
- (31) Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. 87-97
- (32) *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, Allan Wade (ed). (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954). 613